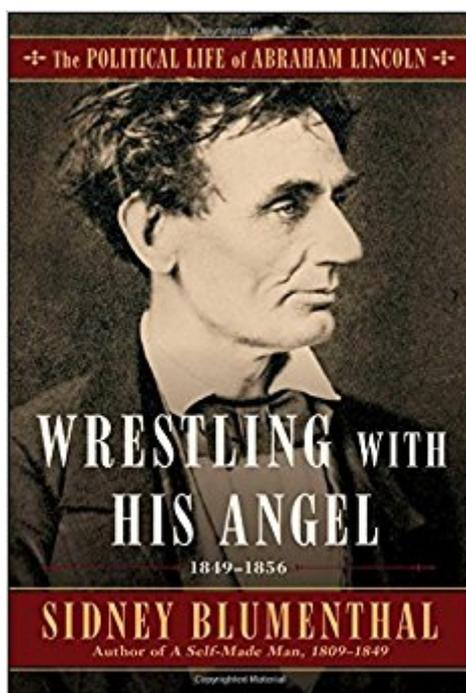


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Wrestling With His Angel: The Political Life Of Abraham Lincoln Vol. II, 1849-1856



Synopsis

“Magisterial...A vividly written, wide-ranging and often surprising account of the president-to-be.”
• The New York Times Book Review “Masterful.”
• Los Angeles Times Volume II of Sidney Blumenthal’s acclaimed, landmark biography, *The Political Life of Abraham Lincoln*, reveals the future president’s genius during the most decisive period of his political life when he seizes the moment, finds his voice, and helps create a new political party. In 1849, Abraham Lincoln seems condemned to political isolation and defeat. His Whig Party is broken in the 1852 election, and disintegrates. His perennial rival, Stephen Douglas, forges an alliance with the Southern senators and Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. Violent struggle breaks out on the plains of Kansas, a prelude to the Civil War. Lincoln rises to the occasion. Only he can take on Douglas in Illinois, and he finally delivers the dramatic speech that leaves observers stunned. In 1855, he makes a race for the Senate, which he loses when he throws his support to a rival to prevent the election of a proslavery candidate. Now, in *Wrestling With His Angel*, Sidney Blumenthal explains how Lincoln and his friends operate behind the scenes to destroy the anti-immigrant party in Illinois to clear the way for a new Republican Party. Lincoln takes command and writes its first platform and vaults onto the national stage as the leader of a party that will launch him to the presidency. The *Washington Monthly* hailed Blumenthal’s Volume I as, “splendid|no one can come away from reading *A Self-Made Man* without eagerly anticipating the ensuing volumes.” Now, in one of the greatest American success stories, *Wrestling With His Angel* brings Lincoln from the wilderness to the peak of his career as he takes control of the nation’s most profound spiritual crisis—slavery—and enters the battle for the nation’s soul.

Book Information

Series: *The Political Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Book 2)

Hardcover: 608 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; 1st Edition edition (May 16, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1501153781

ISBN-13: 978-1501153785

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #13,106 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Lawyers & Judges #19 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > Civil War #39 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > US Presidents

Customer Reviews

"Sidney Blumenthal's first volume, *A Self-Made Man*, wove a broad and intricate counterpoint between the young life of Abraham Lincoln and the politics of Jacksonian America. Blumenthal extends that superb counterpoint in *Wrestling With His Angel*, giving us the best account we have of the big-screen context of Lincoln and the explosive political events during the decade he strode to the front of the American stage. Blumenthal illuminates the path Lincoln hewed to greatness. This is the best political history we have had of Abraham Lincoln since James G. Randall and Allan Nevins." (Allen Guelzo, author of *Gettysburg*, winner of the Lincoln Prize)

"Sidney Blumenthal has achieved something quite unexpected: he has rescued the Lincoln most Americans know only as an icon, and turned him back into a real human being, revealing a clever and adroit politician, a fixer of conventions, and a political operator whose ambitions are surpassed only by his searing moral vision." (Kai Bird, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*)

"A timely and important book. Rather than diminishing his sympathy for the 16th President's inner turmoil, Blumenthal's long historical view has yielded an exceptionally nuanced and compassionate portrait of Lincoln and the circumstances that shaped his career." (Amanda Foreman, author of *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*)

"*Wrestling With His Angel* is a raucous and epic voyage through the turbulent political waters of the age that made Abraham Lincoln. Blumenthal has crafted a Melvillian narrative of the era of secession and the men who navigated it. Completely mesmerizing, a deeply serious meditation with the keen sense of humor that Lincoln so famously had." (John Witt, author of the *Lincoln's Code*, winner of the Bancroft Prize)

"*Wrestling With His Angel* is dramatic narrative history, prophetic and intimate—painfully at times. Blumenthal makes our nation's moral cleavage appear tragically ordained, perhaps insurmountable, which renders his luminous portrait of Lincoln all the more revelatory." (Diane McWhorter, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Carry Me Home*)

"In the second volume of his masterful biography, Sidney Blumenthal tells the story of Lincoln's political self-fashioning in the 1850s, and his entrance onto the stage of

Ã history. With vigorous prose, deep knowledge, and energetic narrative momentum,Ã BlumenthalÃ shows how Lincoln defined himself Ã against his rival Stephen Douglas, learnedÃ how to become a persuasive Ã orator, fortified his intellectual opposition to slavery, and fought the anti-immigrant Ã “Know-Nothing” party that was dominating American politics. Read it for a total immersion inÃ pre-Civil War politics that has startling relevance to our own era. (Elaine Showalter, author of *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe*)

“Blumenthal immerses the reader in American politics in the years between Lincoln’s return to Springfield, after completing his term in the House of Representatives, and his contribute to founding the Illinois Republican Party.” (Publishers Weekly)

“An ambitious old-fashioned ensemble piece, history as theater, which sets the stage for the Civil War. . . we have two more volumes to anticipate from Blumenthal’s finely etched drama of history, illuminating Lincoln’s craggy character in a fuller, clearer light.” (U.S. News & World Report)

“Masterful” (The Los Angeles Times)

“Magnificent” . . . Blumenthal explores in superbly researched and beautifully written detail the crucial period when Lincoln’s public and private statements began to reflect “a moderate politician with radical thoughts.” . . . extremely well done, and anyone interested in Lincoln’s political career will want to read it.

(Bookpage)

[Blumenthal] provides the deep and often lurid background of the age in which Lincoln lived, operated, practiced law, raised a family, and became a political genius. . . This soon to be four-volume biography of Lincoln is the most readable to date and promises to be a modern classic in understanding Lincoln’s life. (Civil War Book Review)

“Everything and everyone in Blumenthal’s rich study of 19th-century political life acts upon the man who became the 16th president in 1861. . . Wrestling With His Angel contains fascinating portraits of other historical figures. . . monumental.” (The Guardian)

“Blumenthal brings a sharp, battle-honed political mind to the task of re-telling this seemingly familiar story. . . His feel for the heat of partisan combat gives his book a sense of immediacy and excitement. More than that, he draws insightful parallels between the bitter political fights of the 19th and 21st centuries, suggesting that the great moral divides of the past are still with us today. . . Wrestling With His Angel manages to put flesh on the dry bones of forgotten political characters. . . Wrestling With His Angel retells this crucial chapter in Lincoln’s story with fresh eyes, ones that don’t miss its relevance to today.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“A deeply fascinating story in an often overlooked period of Lincoln’s life. . . Blumenthal draws one vivid picture after another of these least-known years of Lincoln’s

life . . . " intelligent and rigorous." (Christian Science Monitor) "Blumenthal is urgent, unflagging, so full of a sense of an impending doom for the republic that, by the end of the book, it almost seems beyond belief that any one person could rise equal to the task of saving it." (Allen Guelzo Washington Monthly) "Blumenthal has spent his life in the interconnected worlds of politics and journalism, and it shows: He grasps that political genius in ways others could not, making Lincoln more politically plausible." (The Washington Post) "A sprawling account of the larger political history of the United States" (The New York Review of Books) "Grippingly and gracefully written." (James Fallows, The Atlantic) "Magisterial . . . A vividly written, wide-ranging and often surprising account of the president-to-be." (The New York Times Book Review)

Sidney Blumenthal is the former assistant and senior adviser to President Bill Clinton, and senior adviser to Hillary Clinton. He has been a national staff reporter for The Washington Post, Washington editor and staff writer for The New Yorker, senior writer for The New Republic, and contributed to numerous additional publications. His books include the bestselling The Clinton Wars, The Rise of the Counter-Establishment and The Permanent Campaign. Among his films, he was the executive producer of the Academy Award- and Emmy Award-winning Taxi to the Dark Side.

I would not agree with Sidney Blumenthal 93% of the time on political issues, but as a political historian I find his book fascinating! I love how he weaves the people and the events of the times into the story of Lincoln. Am eagerly looking forward to his third installment on the political Life of Abraham Lincoln!!!

Lincoln-Douglas debate - 1854 I am essentially finished with the second volume of Sidney Blumenthal's Trilogy on Lincoln: 1849 - 1856 - Wrestling with his Angel - a poor title likely created by his marketing agent, not the author. The key chapter is called "The Blood of the Revolution" - referring to the Declaration of Independence, and other anti slavery sentiments of the founders. Blumenthal, a Bill Clinton former aide, documents that the first Lincoln Douglas "debate" took place at the Illinois State Fair in October, 1854. Douglas, the Illinois Senator who rammed the Kansas-Nebraska bill through Congress earlier that year, had taken over the leadership of the pro slavery Democratic Party, and was the leading demagogue in the country. He (Douglas) spoke at the Illinois State House, since a downpour muddied an open grove reserved for 5,000 people in

Springfield, location of the State Fair. Lincoln spoke the next day at the State House, in short sleeves, using 17,000 words to devastate Douglas, whose bill had destroyed the Compromises of 1820 and 1850, and reignited a fierce national debate on slavery, and a civil war in Kansas. Lincoln exposed that Nebraska "is a small matter - to establish a principle, for FUTURE USE to the planting of slavery wherever in wide world..." William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, in a judicial circuit half as large as New England, in Illinois, reported in the Illinois Journal, the Whig newspaper of Illinois, that this was the "profoundest ... that he has made in his whole life... (Douglas bill was) torn and rent asunder by the hot bolts of truth".

Well written. Gives insight and context to the times in which Lincoln was developing as a politician.

Book was received promptly and in great condition. A very interesting and informative book about a great man.

An insightful and fascinating look into the deeper soul of Abraham Lincoln, and his decision, encouraged by Mary Todd Lincoln, to enter politics. This is a great follow-up to Blumenthal's first book in this series, *A Self-Made Man*. A must read for all Lincoln aficionados, and those of us who are just getting to know him.

Another must-read book in Blumenthal's four-part series on the political life of Abraham Lincoln. This second volume covers the period between 1849 and 1856, much of which time Lincoln was essentially out of politics. Following his single term as a U.S. Congressman, Lincoln returned to Springfield to build his law practice. He was politically absent as others in the East fought the battles leading to the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. It was the latter that "aroused" Lincoln as never before and got him back into politics. Covered are Lincoln's first set of debates against Stephen A. Douglas in 1854 and the run-up to Lincoln's first failed Senate race in 1856. Lincoln purists will perhaps find the book woefully missing its main character as Lincoln rarely appears in the first two-thirds of the book and essentially absent from 80% of it. Some may see this as a weakness of the book, but I see it as its main strength. Lincoln was, in fact, not intimately involved in the political tug of wars going on in Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and Washington, DC during this period. In his first book of the series, Blumenthal spends considerable time exploring the other actors and events that set the stage for the rise of Lincoln. This is especially important in this period of Lincoln's political inactivity and essential for the understanding of conditions that allowed

Lincoln to become the leader he became. Blumenthal aptly documents the actions of key figures such as aging icons Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun, as well as the rise of Stephen A. Douglas and Jefferson Davis. This deep background, using today's parlance, is absolutely necessary for a proper understanding of both the times and of Lincoln himself. Blumenthal's in-depth and highly researched scholarship brings the times to clarity for us all. The final few chapters focus more on Lincoln as he struggles with the demise of the Whigs and the ascension of a new Republican party. After losing the Senate race as a Whig (on a technicality and deception by the Democrats in Illinois), Lincoln helped to formalize the Illinois Republican party and quickly rose to become one of its great leaders. The book ends prior to the 1856 presidential race, the first in which a Republican candidate is put forth. The next volume, according to Blumenthal, should cover the period from that election, through the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates that gave Lincoln national exposure, past the 1860 election, and all the way up to Gettysburg. If you haven't read these first two books, start now. They are hefty in both size and scholarship, but well worth the time.

While this second volume of what is now projected to be a four-volume study of Lincoln's political life is not quite as engaging as the first volume, it is still very much worth the reader's investment of both money and time. The first 3/4 of this new book describes the contentious political environment in the U.S. after Lincoln's return to Illinois after his one term in Congress, and his disappointment at not receiving an appointment in the new Whig administration. That disappointment was then compounded by the election of Democrat Franklin Pierce in 1852, the rise to prominence of Lincoln's nemesis, Sen Stephen Douglas, through his shepherding of the Kansas-Nebraska Act through Congress, and the slow collapse of the Whig party as a national power. As with the first volume, Mr Blumenthal has obviously done a prodigious amount of research in the primary sources to detail Lincoln's evolving political strategy and philosophy, notably his abhorrence of slavery. I very much look forward to volume III, which will presumably treat the Lincoln-Douglas Senate race and the famous debates of 1858, and the birth of the Republican Party. Highly recommended.

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